MONTONI;

OR,

THE CONFESSIONS OF

THE MONK OF SAINT BENEDICT.

A ROMANCE.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY EDWARD MORTIMER, ESQ.

Author of Friar Hildargo.

Avaunt, and quit my sight, let the earth hide thee;
Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold;
Thou hast no speculation in those eyes
That thou dost glare with.

SHAKESPEARE.

VOL. II.

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MONTONI.

CHAP. I.

TOWARDS the close of the second day, Alphonso found himself in the midst of a dreary wood.

After he had passed some time, in endeavouring to find a hut where he could rest till the dawn of the next morning, the gloomy shades of night rapidly advanced, and rendered it impossible for him to continue his journey.

He therefore alighted from his steed, and, turning him loose, that he might graze on the scanty herbage around, sat down on the projecting roots of a large tree, against the trunk of which he leaned, and endeavoured to compose himself to rest.

Suddenly some faint sounds attracted his attention; and hoping that it proceeded from some hamlet, where he might obtain an easier couch than the one necessity had forced him to take, he arose, and, mounting his horse, proceeded in the direction of the noise.

He had not advanced far ere he discovered a light amongst the trees, which now guiding his steps, he soon was near enough to discover a party

of men lying on the ground, with some flasks of wine before them.

He was, however, yet at too great a distance to hear their conversation.

Feeling curious to know whether they were a party of banditti, or some travellers who thus passed the night, after the toils of the day, he left his horse, and endeavoured to approach them, through the surrounding underwood.

This he with difficulty effected; and, when he was as near as his safety permitted, he was not long in doubt as to their occupation.

About ten ferocious figures were stretched beneath the trees.

Before them were a few lighted faggots, by the blaze of which he saw some coffers, whose contents were lying on the ground, consisting of valuable merchandize, and some bags of gold.

"By San Marco," said one of the men, as he took up a bag, and poured out his contents—"this was no trifling booty. Let me see, here's some fifty or sixty ducats in every one of these bags: but, by the mass, we have well deserved it, for they fought hard."

"Ay," returned another, "but that was of little consequence, for they

are

are all snug enough now. Come, let us be good Catholics, and drink to the repose of their souls."

At this the rest laughed, and were putting the flasks to their mouths, when one of them, happening to look up, discovered Alphonso.

He instantly alarmed his companions, who hastily seized their arms, and rushed after him.

Resistance against so many was useless. Nevertheless, Alphonso, in hopes of escaping, long defended himself against their attacks, till at length his sword was broke, and he was obliged to surrender.

With many execrations, they now made him follow them to the place where the spoil was they had taken, and which they were collecting when a horn sounded.

Several responses appeared to be made, some of which seemed to be near at hand, and others were scarcely heard, on account of their distance.

As soon as they had ceased, one of the gang, taking a horn, which hung by his side, sounded it for some minutes.

They now packed up their ill-gotten treasures, and striking into the remote parts of the forest, continued their journey

ney till they approached what appeared to be an ancient castle.

Crossing a court which was full of rank weeds and ruins (for several parts of the building had fallen into it, and lay scattered in large masses around), the party entered a hall, of which the walls were all that remained, for the roof had fallen in.

The party, climbing over the heaps of rubbish, at length stopped at the further end.

Gallino, who appeared to have the command of the gang, now ordered some of them to raise the trap door;

 which

which being done, Alphonso beheld beneath it a flight of stone steps.

There the robbers descended, and conducted him to a large cave, in the centre of which was a long table, with several benches round it.

A large iron lamp depended from the roof, and, though assisted by a blazing fire, formed of turf and the withered branches of pine, dimly illumined the extensive place, whose walls, being of the rugged rock, were formed by the hand of nature.

A few of the banditti were seated at the further end of the table, who, on seeing Alphonso, rose, and came forward.

"Where is Sebastiano?" said Gallino to them.

"He is gone to see the woman," returned one—"to amuse himself, as I suppose, with her howling."

"Tell him to come," said Gallino, to see my prisoner."

Alphonso, who had hitherto kept a disdainful silence, now demanded for what reason he was detained.

Gallino laughed, and said he would know when the capitano arrived, who would, no doubt, make him pay dearly for his secreting himself in the forest, to be a spy upon their actions.

He had scarcely uttered these words when Sebastiano entered the cave.

He was of a stout athletic figure, his air commanding, and his countenance forbidding and morose. He hastily advanced towards Alphonso; but no sooner had he cast his eyes on him than he started, and they seemed to sparkle with a savage exultation.

"Ha!" said he, "by San Marco, this is well. My turn is now come. Hugo, conduct this prisoner to the north cemetry. There let him watch over the bones of your comrades, and linger in hunger and misery, till his detested carcass taints the air.

"Such is the way I will reward him for

for the wound he gave me near St. Rema, and for having slain Bertrand and Lupigno, when we attacked Manfred and his party."

The banditti, hearing this, drew their swords, and, with horrible execrations, were going instantly to murder him; but Sebastiano started forward, and beat down their thirsty weapons.

"Hold!" said he—"Whoever touches him dies. No: that were poor revenge: he shall not so cheaply pay for his offence."

"And think you," said Alphonso, "that I fear a robber's threats? No,

Sebastiano; you may confine my body, but my soul disdains your fetters. If you would shew yourself a man, give me a sword, and obtain an honourable revenge.

"But why do I talk of honour, or deign to hold converse with a midnight assassin—the unprincipled leader of a banditti. Lead me to my dungeon, far from the sight of so base, so contemptible an object."

Sebastiano smiled, and, with a malicious look, said—"'Tis well: we mind not the fluttering of a bird entangled in the net; but, mark my words, dearly shall you rue your insulting converse. Away with him to the

the dungeon, since he desires it so much."

Alphonso turned away from him with contempt, and followed some of the gang, who conducted him, through many long passages, to the place where Sebastiano had ordered him to be confined, in which having thrust him, they made fast the door, leaving him in total darkness.

A horrible putrid smell, which filled the dungeon, convinced him that the mortal remains of some poor wretch were returning to their original dust.

He thought they could not be far from him; and, in endeavouring to get farther off, he stumbled against something

thing which lay on the ground. When he stooped down to feel what it was, he quickly started away with horror; for he laid his hand on a human face, the dampness of which convinced him the possessor had been dead some time.

His fortitude now almost forsook him, when he reflected that in this dreadful abode, he was to wear out the remainder of his days—no friend to succour him, no pitying hand to close his eyes.

Oppressed with the deepest melancholy, he sat down on the humid ground, and reflected on his situation.

Victoria's lovely form, he concluded, he should now never behold—

never

never more see the cheering light of day!

"Alas!" thought he, "for what purpose was existence given me? Is it to try with what fortitude a human being can support accumulating misfortunes, without repining at the will of Heaven; for surely such a situation as this would reduce any to despair who had not the firmest reliance on its goodness.

The door of his dungeon was now unlocked, and a man entered, carrying a pitcher of water and a small loaf of bread.

"Here," said he, "is your allowance

ance for three days: at the end of that time I will bring you more."

The torch that the man carried served to shew Alphonso the extent of his miserable abode.

Lying near him was the corpse which had so greatly shocked him; and as the light flashed along the sides, he saw, at the further extremity, a heap of bodies thrown on each other, forming a spectacle of horror beyond conception dreadful.

The man soon rejoining his comrades at the door, Alphonso was again left in profound darkness. He now threw himself on his knees, and earnestly recommending himself to the protection of Heaven, began to examine,

as well as he was able, the walls of his dungeon. In so doing his steps were continually impeded by the sad remnants of mortality. While he was thus employed, he suddenly started; for a deep groan mournfully resounded through the dungeon. It appeared almost close to him. He called two or three times to know if there was any other person besides himself in it, and was answered by a faint female voice; which he immediately concluded must be that of the unfortunate prisoner alluded to by one of the banditti in the cave.

He immediately proceeded in the direction of the voice, till stopped by the wall; when he addressed the unfortunate female, and, in the course of

of his inquiries, learnt from her that in her dungeon there was a grating in the roof, which admitted the light.

Pleased with this intelligence, he immediately carefully felt every part of the wall on that side.

But, alas! no projecting or loose stone met his search, nor had he any means of effecting a breach in it.

Dispirited by this circumstance, he sat down to reflect on what he should do; when amongst other things that occurred, was the careless manner in which the robbers disposed of their dead.

He was in hopes that he might, perhaps,

perhaps, find some arms about the body which he had discovered.

In that idea he set about the disgusting task of searching it.

At length, to his great joy, he found a rusty dagger in the belt.

With this he proceeded to the wall, and began, enlivened with the hopes of escaping, to loosen the cement which connected the stones, and having, though not without difficulty, succeeded in removing two or three large ones, he proceeded with more ease, and at length had the satisfaction to effect an aperture.

This work kept him in constant em-

ploy

ploy for near two days: he was therefore forced to desist, for fear of his operations being discovered by the man when he should visit him again with provisions.

In the mean time he conversed with the female, who informed him that she had been near eight years confined by Sebastiano, the last two of which, as well as she could recollect, had been passed in that dungeon, in consequence of her having refused to acquiesce to his villainous intentions, which induced him to surprise and convey her from her husband.

She further informed him that she had for some time only received her provisions once in three days; that Sebastiano

tiano brought them himself, and that she then hourly expected him.

Footsteps which Alphonso heard in the passage now made him start from the place he was in, for fear his attempt to escape should be discovered; for he hoped that if he could get into the next dungeon, he should be able to force the grating and effect his deliverance, and that of the unfortunate female, by means of the aperture.

The door of the dungeon was now opened, and his provisions were left as before.

The man did not attempt to speak, but seemed terrified at entering the melancholy abode of his departed comrades;

rades; and retreated as fast as he was able, carefully closing the door after him.

A noise in the next dungeon, shortly after, attracted his attention. It was Sebastiano talking to his prisoner; but in so low a tone that Alphonso could not distinguish what he said.

He now refreshed himself with some of his coarse and scanty allowance.

Having waited till Sebastiano had retired, he proceeded with his work, and soon pulled down a sufficient part of the wall, to admit his body.

When he had passed through the

aperture,

aperture, he found himself in a low stone chamber, with the unfortunate female, whose hollow cheeks and emaciated form, seemed to announce her approaching dissolution.

With anxious expectation Alphonso hastily advanced to the grating in the roof, which having examined, to his great joy he found that it was rather loose, and that there was little doubt but that he should be able to remove it.

From the high grass which waved over it, and part of the ruin which met his eye, he conjectured that it was in the court-yard, which he had crossed the night he arrived at the building.

Alphonso now essayed to loosen the bars from the stone-work in which they were fixed, and at length succeeded in removing as many of them as answered his purpose.

The poor captive, whose deliverance he was endeavouring to effect as well as his own, could only assist him with her prayers for his success; for her strength and health were so much impaired by her long confinement, that it was with difficulty that she could walk across the dungeon.

Alphonso determined to wait for the approach of night, and the return of the banditti from their predatory excursions, as they would then be sure of some hours to effect their escape.

With

With the greatest anxiety he watched the beams of the sun, till they ceased to gild the summit of the mouldering walls, which the welcome shades of evening soon after hid from his view: and the sound of a distant horn spoke the return of the banditti, which was sometime after announced by the echoes of their paces as they crossed the court-yard.

Waiting with impatience till all was quiet, and the banditti likely to have retired to repose, with palpitating bosoms they prepared for their departure.

Alphonso raised his fellow prisoner through the broken grating, but scarcely had she stood on the ground of the court-yard, when her tall

figure caught the attention of some of the men who were walking amongst the ruins, and who, imagining they beheld an apparition, ran hastily into the hall with fearful acclamations.

This alarming the banditti, they hastily armed themselves and rushed out of the cavern, concluding that their comrades were pursued to their retreat.

Alphonso had just time to get the affrighted female down again to her prison, and to replace the bars, when some of the gang came to the place where they were informed their comrades had beheld a spectre rise out of the ground.

Nothing

Nothing that could give rise to such an idea, meeting their view, they derided the fears of their brethren, and shortly after retired to their subterranean abode.

Alphonso and his companion scarcely breathed during this momentous crisis, for they feared that should some of the banditti be curious enough to examine the bars, their being loose might lead to a suspicion of the fact, and render their hopes of escaping fruitless.

They now waited a long time, till they concluded that they need no longer fear observation.

Having emerged from their comfortless abode, they crossed the court-yard, and retired into the most obscure recesses of the forest, and, after having travelled the remainder of the night with as much speed as Alphonso's feeble companion could exert, discovered with heart-felt sensations of delight, by the cheering beams of the morning, the welcome sight of a village which was but a short distance from them; though owing to the languid and emaciated state she was in, they were long in reaching it.

They soon procured all the comfort and accommodations which the first cottage they came to could afford, and Alphonso

Alphonso determined to stay there till the strength of his companion was a little recruited.

The happy change of her situation after so many years of captivity, again to taste the sweets of liberty, and the hopes of being restored to her friends, animated her woe-worn frame: frequently did she express her gratitude to Alphonso, who at the close of the second day after her arrival at the village, begging to know the cause of her long captivity, she thus related her history.

CHAP. II.

The History of Donna Leonora De Gonzales.

"I SHOULD be most ungrateful, Signor," said the lady, "if, after the signal service you have rendered me, I were to refuse to relate the occurrences of my unhappy life; in doing which I must go back to an early period of it, in order to mention a circumstance which involved our family in distress, and was finally the cause of my long miserable confinement.

"My

"My father, Don Sancho Remirez, a Spanish grandee, was the inheritor of a considerable estate; he married at an early period of his life to an amiable woman, whom he had long loved, but who, unfortunately dying three years after, left an elder sister and myself to his care.

"Our juvenile years were passed in a state of uninterrupted felicity, but which was at length broken by the conduct of my sister, who imprudently listened to the addresses of a man whose general character spoke so little in his favour that my father, foreseeing the misery which would be the infallible consequence of such an alliance, forbade him his castle, and solemnly protested he would disinherit

my sister, should she persist in encouraging his addresses.

"Don Gomez, however, found means to elude his vigilance, and persuaded my sister to elope with him; they were privately married, when my father, strictly observing his threats, revoked his will, which was made in her favour, and bequeathed to me the whole of his extensive possessions.

"Previous to this event I had been placed at a convent, which was at a considerable distance from Don Sancho's residence, for the purpose of improvement, and while there I learnt this distressing circumstance, which I knew could not fail of rendering him extremely miserable, and which, indeed,

deed, shortly after, was fatal to him, for ere two months had elapsed from the period of my sister's elopement a messenger arrived with the sad intelligence of his decease.

"Grief for a long period completely absorbed my faculties, but the attentive kindness of the nuns, joined to the lenient hand of time, abating my sorrows, brought me to a recollection of my situation; and seeing the propriety there was of immediately visiting my paternal residence to peruse my dear father's will, which remained there, and to regulate my domestic concerns, I accordingly set out from the convent, and at the close of the third day arrived at the castle.

" I was rather surprised on entering the avenue, which was in front of it, to observe a number of lights in the different chambers, but conceiving that it was in consequence of the preparations making for my reception, I passed on and entered the folding portals of the grand hall.

" Here I beheld, to my utter astonishment, a set of new domestics, who scarcely deigned to notice me; and on making inquiry of the reason from Alvedo, who had been for many years my father's steward, and who, I afterwards learnt, was the only one of his domestics who still remained, I was surprised to find that my sister Gertrude had taken possession of the castle and its domains for more than three

months, as authorized by the will of her late father.

"My father's will!' I exclaimed—'Did he not leave his possessions to me, Alvedo?'

"So we all understood, Signora,' returned the steward—' but as soon as Don Sancho died the Signora Gertrude came to the castello, accompanied by Don Gomez, and put their seals on the cabinet and apartments belonging to him, and immediately departed; some time after your sister returned, and having ordered the cabinet to be opened, a will was found in it, which was read by the monk, who attended Don Sancho in his last moments,

ments, by which, excepting a small sum of money, you were left entirely destitute and dependent on your sister.'

" Oh, heavens!' I exclaimed— ' that will, Alvedo, is an infamous forgery; but I shall have certain proof, I will see it; and if such was really my father's intention I will again return to the convent and pass my days amongst its gloomy, solemn shades, rather than stoop to live a poor dependant on the bounty of Don Gomez.'

" Calm your agitated feelings, Signora,' said the venerable steward— ' I have my suspicions, but we must

be

be cautious, another time I will, if you please, be more explicit, this place is too public for us to converse in.'

"The domestic, who had announced my arrival to my sister, now returned, and I followed him into an apartment, where I beheld her seated by the side of the detested Gomez.

"Both appeared greatly agitated on seeing me, and I no longer looked on her either as a sister or a friend, but rather beheld in her and her husband the murderers of my dear father.

"She affected to treat me with kindness, and introduced me to Gomez, assured me I might rely on her sisterly affection

affection for every happiness it was in her power to bestow, as our dear father (and here she affected to weep) had, before he died, altered his will in her favour, and that she would endeavour to alleviate the disappointment which I must feel, as I had been taught to consider myself heiress to his estates.

"I replied, rather haughtily, that, as my father had not made me acquainted with such a proceeding, I had a right to entertain my doubts concerning the existence of the will, which she affirmed he had made, and that I should, therefore, expect to see it on the morrow.

"I did not wait for her answer, but,

but, leaving the apartment, retired to my chamber, and there awaited with impatience the approaching dawn; but being excessively fatigued with my journey, notwithstanding the agitation of my mind, I threw myself on my couch and soon fell into a deep slumber, from which I was suddenly awoke by the entrance of several men, with the detested Gomez at their head, who dragged me from my couch, and, throwing a large mantle over me, conducted me through several passages to some steps, which I was a long time in ascending; when we arrived at the top, one of the men taking off the mantle, I saw myself at the entrance of a large chamber, into which I was dragged by Gomez:

"'This,' said he, 'as you have dared to question my authority for taking possession of these domains, shall be your future residence.'

"I disdained to reply, and seated myself, overcome with the horror of my situation, in the only chair my new melancholy abode afforded.

"My conductors immediately retired, carefully fastening the door after them, leaving me in total darkness. I sat for a long time, ruminating on my unfortunate situation, when I perceived the day begin to dawn, through several crevices, which appeared to be formed by boards which were placed before the casements.

"I arose

"I arose, and, on examination, found my conjectures to be right; and that several planks were strongly nailed over them, in order to preclude the possibility of escape, or of letting my situation be known to any person who might pass beneath the casement.

"When the day had somewhat dawned, footsteps in the passage announced the approach of some person.

"Gomez entered my chamber. The frown which had before contracted his brow now disappeared: he approached me with a smile, and, taking my hand (which I in vain endeavoured to free from his detested grasp), said—

'Dearest Leonora, I am touched with

with compassion for your situation, which I was unfortunately obliged to consent to, that I might avoid being suspected by your implacable sister, of my favourable intentions towards you.

"Suffer me now, lovely Leonora, to open the gates of your prison, and restore you to liberty. There is one promise, however, which I must first solicit you to make.'

"Here Gomez paused; and I demanded the nature of the promise he was so urgent with me to make."

"It is,' said he, 'to accept the adoration of your adoring Gomez.'

"Monster!'

"Monster!' I exclaimed, in an agony of rage at the insult offered me—'Quit my presence, nor dare to presume again to sully my ears with your infamous protestations.

"Seek not to add insult to fraud; and know, vile man! that Leonora would rather die than speak other words than those expressive of her utmost contempt and abhorrence of him who leagued with a sister to destroy a father, and now, by the most unparalleled villainy, deprives me of my rights, and offends my ears with his detestable expressions of love.'

"During this reply, the face of Don Gomez turned of a livid hue, and his whole

whole frame trembled with his malicious rage.

"Signora,' said he, 'you will rue this insolence; for, from this hour, this apartment shall be your constant residence.'

"So saying, he departed; and I remained in that chamber, I believe, more than a year, almost constantly persecuted with his addresses, which I treated with all the contempt I was mistress of.

"One evening a dreadful storm, which shook the castle to its deep foundations, threw down a large painting, which was affixed against one of the walls,

walls, and, to my astonishment, I perceived behind it a loose pannel.

"Much agitated, I instantly approached it, and, on examination, found that it was a private communication from my apartment to some other parts of the castello.

"I looked eagerly into the aperture; but all beyond was enveloped in darkness.

"I waited impatiently for the dawn, when I found, to my great delight, that the pannel opened to a large gallery I was well acquainted with.

"At that time I did not dare to attempt

tempt my escape, lest I should be perceived by some of the residents in the castello.

"When I returned into my chamber, fearful that the pannel should be noticed by Gomez, who possibly might enter during the day, or the domestic who brought my provisions, with the greatest difficulty I replaced the painting.

"I was not, however, that day persecuted with the company of Gomez; and with pleasure I beheld, through the small apertures before the casements, the shades of evening descending around.

"I waited with impatience till I heard

heard the midnight hour proclaimed by the castle clock, when, taking down the painting, I commenced my efforts for my liberty.

"I perfectly recollected where the apartments of the steward Alvedo was; and to it I hastily proceeded.

"The old man was greatly astonished; for he, as well as the other domestics, had been taught to believe that I left the castello on the same night I arrived.

"I lost no time in explaining to him my situation.

"We concerted together on the

best mode of my procuring my liberty.

"The night was too far spent to render it safe for me to depart then, as in case of a search being made after me, there was every reason to fear that I should be found.

"I therefore was obliged to wait till the next night, when Alvedo promised to attend me in my flight from the castello.

"I then returned to my apartment, replaced the painting as before, and, in the hopes that I should soon be far from my persecutors, enjoyed a tranquil repose, which for many months I had been a stranger to.

When

" When the gloom of the succeeding evening darkened my apartment, with a trembling hand I unloosed the painting, as I hoped, for the last time, and recommending myself to the protection of Providence, left my chamber.

In the passage I found the faithful Alvedo awaiting my arrival, and in silence we proceeded along several corridors, till we came to a flight of stairs; which, having descended, a small portal appeared before us.

" Here Alvedo, turning to me, said,—' I hope, Signora, you will not be alarmed at crossing the vaults of the castello : it is the safest and only way, by which you can leave it unobserved,

as I know a passage which is formed beneath the castle moat, and terminates in the adjoining forest; the trap-door at the extremity of which is carefully concealed in the hollow of a large tree.'

"I impatiently assured Alvedo of my willingness to encounter any scenes of horror, to effect my liberty, and free me from the hateful addresses of Don Gomez.

"The old man then silently unfastened the door, which slowly creaking on its hinges, disclosed the dreary repositories of the dead, through which we began to proceed, when suddenly a ray of light shone on the monument of the deceased Don Sancho.

"Overcome

"Overcome with a thousand tender remembrances at this sight, I did not reflect on that singular circumstance, and was hastily rushing forward to weep over the spot which contained the ashes of my father, but was withheld by Alvedo, who, extinguishing the taper he held, conjured me in a low voice to be silent, and pointing to the spot from whence the light proceeded, we distinctly perceived two figures gliding among the distant tombs, and disappear in the interspaces which were involved in utter darkness.

"Concluding the forms I had seen to be those of unquiet spirits, performing their nocturnal penances in the place where their mortal remains were interred, I was struck with affright, and

clung to Alvedo to prevent me from falling to the earth, while I strained my aching eyes towards the spot where I had beheld the objects of my terror.

"No sound, however, met my inquiring ears—all objects were enveloped in the murky impenetrable gloom which presided in those abodes of death.

"Trusting to the guidance of Alvedo, I now cautiously advanced, fearful of hurting myself against the marble projections of the tombs.

"We had not long proceeded in this manner, when the light again attracted our attention: it was now nearer to us, and we more plainly perceived

ceived the two figures, one of whom carried a pickaxe and a spade, and the other a lamp, whom I now thought greatly resembled Gomez.

"I then silently advanced to a monument that was not far off, and concealing myself behind it plainly distinguished his detested form and that of his attendant, who was the same who always brought me my provisions.

"They seemed to be attentively examining the ground, and I heard the man say :——

"You may depend on it, Signor, that this is the place; for I noticed particularly the situation, which was

five paces east of Don Ignacio's monument.'

"'Well, then,' returned Gomez, 'raise up the earth. I have constantly reproached myself for not destroying these papers, and this night passes not without the claims of Leonora being effectually destroyed.'

"I scarce dared to breathe, lest a word of their discourse should escape me.

"The domestic now opened the ground, and, after some time, I saw him lift a small box out of the earth, which he gave to Gomez, who opened it, and was taking some papers out of it

it when the idea forcibly struck me that it was the will of my lamented parent, which was now about to be destroyed, and, exerting myself, I cried out in a deep voice,—'forbear.'

"The reverberating echoes long dwelt amid those vaulted recesses, and even startled me with their continuance. It was as if my departed ancestors, assisting my wishes, had each in hollow cadences repeated my exclamation, in order that the will of my beloved parent might be preserved.

"Struck with sudden affright at the sounds, Gomez and the domestic started up, and hastily retreated from the place.

"After waiting a few minutes to see if they would return, I went with Alvedo towards the spot, in hopes of finding the box which Gomez had dropped in his terror.

"We soon found out the place by the heap of loose earth, and my faithful old companion after some search felt the box, which he took up, and we then endeavoured to emerge from those gloomy vaults with as much speed as we were able.

"The steward, who had resided all his life-time in the castello, was perfectly acquainted with the situation of the passage which led to the woods, and having, after wandering a long time in the dark, at length reached a

flight

flight of steps, we ascended them, and Alvedo drawing back some bolts, threw open a door, and looking up, I beheld through the hollow trunk of an ancient tree, the gladsome sight of the star-bespangled sky, and emerging from it, the pure breath of Heaven invigorated my enfeebled frame.

"We travelled the whole of that night as fast as the aged limbs of the faithful steward would allow us, and the next morning were near five leagues from the castello.

"Poor Alvedo now declared he was unable to proceed further, and, oppressed with fatigue, sunk almost senseless on the ground.

"Whilst I was standing near him, considering what I should do to procure him assistance, I beheld at some distance a carriage, attended by several domestics, approaching us, and I resolved to entreat them to convey Alvedo to the nearest cottage, where he might rest his weary limbs.

"The cavalier in the carriage, on seeing us, ordered his drivers to stop; and getting out, came to me and begged to know if he could be in any way serviceable, as he feared that I had sustained some accident, by being unattended in that lonely place at such an early hour.

"I had begun to relate such part of my melancholy history as would sufficiently

ciently account for my situation, when the stranger said :——

"Good Heavens! Do not I behold the daughter of my lamented friend Don Sancho Remirez?'

"You do, Signor,' I returned, with a deep sigh, occasioned by his mentioning the name of my parent, 'and as you have honoured him by styling him your friend, may I intreat you to assist his unfortunate offspring to escape from the power of the basest, vilest of mankind.'

"I should be unworthy of the name of man,' returned the signor, 'if I did not protect you to the utmost of my

power. You, I believe, Signora, have forgot my person, but you may, perhaps, recollect the name of Don Roderigo de Gonzales. I saw you sometimes at your father's castello previous to your residing at the convent. Since that I was almost continually with him, and haply contributed to lull, in some small degree, the sorrow occasioned by his eldest daughter's disobedient conduct, but which, I fear, being too much for him to support, at length consigned him to an untimely grave.

"Suffer me now,' continued Roderigo, 'to conduct you to my mansion, which my sister will endeavour to render agreeable to you till you have obtained

obtained redress for the wrongs you have experienced from the infamous Gomez.'

"It was with some difficulty that I recollected the person of Don Roderigo, for time had so much improved it that unless he had disclosed his name I should probably have still remained in ignorance.

"I accepted his friendly offer with much gratitude, and he conducted me to his carriage.

"Alvedo was accommodated with a horse, and we proceeded on to Roderigo's mansion, where his sister, the

amiable

amiable Theresa, received me with the most assiduous attention.

"Don Roderigo's kindness to me daily increased, he devoted his time to me, and neglected nothing that could tend to comfort and compose my agitated spirits; his kind conduct rendered him an object of tender interest; he avowed his love; nor did I long conceal the affection I entertained for him.

"However, Signor, to shorten my story, suffice it to say, that in a short time I became the bride of the amiable Roderigo de Gonzales.

"The box, which I had obtained

possession

possession of in so miraculous a manner, contained the will of the late Don Sancho, with many other papers relating to his estates, all of which were bequeathed to me.

"Don Roderigo, soon after our union, proceeded to Madrid, and there laid my claims before the Court, and also represented the long confinement I had endured for endeavouring to assert my right.

"The king immediately ordered Don Gomez to come to Madrid and answer for his conduct, but he refused to obey his mandate, and even dared to insult the messenger who brought it to him, in consequence of which he was sentenced to be banished, and the estates,

estates, agreeable to my father's will, came into my possession.

"On the second night after the sentence against Don Gomez had taken place I was alarmed by the cry of fire, and, leaving my apartment, beheld the staircase in flames.

"Roderigo caught me in his arms, and, rushing down, darted through the volumes of smoke and fire, and at last, though with the greatest difficulty and danger, effected my deliverance from the horrible fate, which I thought unavoidable.

"At the moment Roderigo had set me down, and was giving orders to the domestics about the preservation of

of some valuable articles, I was suddenly seized by a man, who, placing a dagger to my bosom, forced me away with him.

" My efforts to escape were in vain, my screams reached the ears of Roderigo, who was hastening to my assistance, but was opposed and prevented by three ruffians, with whom he was desperately engaged, and shortly after I saw him fall weltering in his blood; that horrible sight almost annihilated me, and I sunk insensible on the earth.

" When I revived, what was my horror to find myself in a carriage, with the detested Gomez by my side, and another ruffian, whose dark and horrible

horrible countenance proclaimed him deeply versed in bloody deeds.

"I started at the sight of those wretches, and by my emotion extorted a smile from the author of my misery.

"My revenge,' said he, 'is now complete; at length I have triumphed; you are again in my power, your husband is murdered; and my wishes, which you refused to my entreaties, force shall make you submit to.'

"Infamous wretch!' I exclaimed, 'rather will I die than submit to thy contaminating, loathed embrace; rather would I dwell with the poisonous toad and adder than subject my eyes

to

to the horror of beholding such an accursed sight to them as thou art.'

" 'Tis well,' said Gomez—' We will try thy boasted constancy when you arrive at my future residence, for which I am indebted to you, as well as the loss of your sister, who yesterday, in a fit of despair, terminated her own existence.'

" Shocked at her miserable end, although she was the cause of all my woes, and oppressed by the most heartfelt grief at the too great certainty which there was, that the unfortunate Roderigo was no more, I again became insensible, and so continued with but little intermission the whole of my journey.

" At

"At length we arrived at the ruined castello, where he swore I should remain until I had consented to his wishes.

"You know the rest, Signor; and now permit me to renew my most grateful thanks to you for releasing me from that horrible captivity.

"My wish is now to retire to some convent, until I can make known my deliverance to my own and my lamented Roderigo's relations, and I hope that to-morrow I shall be able to proceed to one.

"I believe I have neglected to inform you of one circumstance, which is, that when Gomez commenced his

depredatory

depredatory course of life he changed his name to that of Sebastiano."

Donna Leonora de Gonzales here concluded, and Alphonso expressed his grief at her eventful narrative.

"Would it were in my power, Signora," said he, "to attend to your concerns, but alas! I am myself the child of woe, nothing but mysteries surround me, and the more I seek to elucidate them the more am I enveloped in their gloomy shades. When I was surprised by the banditti, I was on my way to Genoa, to which place I must proceed as soon as I have the pleasure of seeing you safe from all fears respecting Sebastiano in the sanctuary of a convent."

On

On the following morning, being informed that there was a sisterhood of Carmelites not far from the small village at which they had stopped, Alphonso safely conducted Donna Leonora de Gonzales to it, and after many expressions of her gratitude for his services in delivering her from the power of her dreaded enemy, she took her leave of him, and Alphonso repaired to Genoa in the hopes of finding the peasant Hubert, his father, who, he trusted, would be able, in some degree, to unfold the mysteries that surrounded him.

CHAP.

CHAP. III.

VICTORIA used frequently after the heat of the day to wander amongst the mazes of the extensive gardens belonging to her father's pallazio to enjoy the reviving breeze of evening, and sometimes would extend her walks to the woods that bounded them, and that she might the better indulge her pensive meditations would often ramble about unattended, and in the lonely recesses would build airy structures of future happiness, which she trusted would one day be her lot to enjoy with Alphonso, who, her heart told

told her, she adored with a passion pure as the breath of morn.

Love, which levels all distinctions, made her forget his lowly extraction; titles, birth, and riches, she considered as high sounding words, the enjoyment productive of no real comfort, and of too little import to be considered as an obstacle to her union with the man she loved.

She one afternoon had strolled into the wood, and was proceeding to an elevated spot to enjoy the beautiful prospect which it commanded of the gulph and distant mountains of the tall Apenines, and to view the last faint beams of the setting sun as they trembled on the eastern waves, when she

she heard a shrill whistle, and suddenly some men started from the concealment of the trees, and seized her, almost fainting with the terror excited by their sudden appearance.

Two of them instantly placed her on a horse, to which they bound her trembling form.

Mounting their own horses, they proceeded swiftly along, leading the animal on which was the unfortunate Victoria.

She gazed in silence on the ferocious countenances of her fellow-travellers, endeavouring to collect her courage and fortitude, and wait with patience,

the event of what she was unable to guard against.

The shades of evening soon closed in from her view the surrounding objects.

The clustering clouds poured forth their watery store, while the distant rolling thunder and sudden flashes of lightning startled the horses.

There was no shelter from the storm, but what the thick-clustering foliage of the woods afforded.

Fortunately, however, it was not of long continuance.

When

When the morning dawned, they then stopped for a short time to refresh themselves, and rest their jaded horses.

Victoria sat on a bank, by the side of the road, pondering on the probable consequences of so outrageous an act.

One of the men offered her some provisions; but her heart was too full of grief to permit her to feel the want of food, and, with a trembling voice, she refused his proffered kindness.

Unable longer to support her melancholy, she gave vent to her sorrows by her tears, which fell unheeded by her cruel, hard-hearted conductors.

When they had rested some time, the men again continued their journey, which they pursued, with little intermission, until the close of the day.

They then stopped at a small hovel, situated at the bottom of a gloomy valley; and an old woman, seemingly the sole inhabitant, opened the door.

One of the men, alighting, took Victoria from her horse, and carried her (for she was so much exhausted with fatigue as to be unable to stand) up a dilapidated flight of stairs, into a miserable apartment.

From the dampness of the walls, and the

the ruinous and forlorn state in which it appeared, it seemed to have been long uninhabited.

The man then left her, and the woman came up, a short time after, bringing with her some wine and provision, which she laid on a table, and invited Victoria to partake of.

There was something so forbidding in the countenance of the woman—such an expression of horrible malignity in her features, that Victoria turned from her with sensations of terror and disgust.

She was well assured that from her

she could neither expect pity or assistance.

The woman seemed dissatisfied with the unfortunate Victoria, for not immediately eating the coarse fare she had brought her.

She waited, with evident impatience, till she sparingly partook of the food, and drank a little wine, which revived her languid frame.

She then departed, having carefully fastened the door, and rejoined the ruffians below, whose loud and hoarse voices she plainly heard, though she could not distinguish what was the subject of their conversation.

Victoria, having collected what little furniture there was in the chamber, laid it before the door.

She then reclined on the miserable pallet, to ease her wearied frame; and, where sleep, notwithstanding the horrors of her situation, steeped her seness in a short forgetfulness of her woes.

The morning had but newly dawned ere she arose, and, opening the shattered casement, which was shaded by the creeping ivy, gazed around her.

She could gain no information of her situation; for the view before her was an immense forest, which seemed to skirt some lofty mountains, whose

 summits

summits were enveloped by the clouds.

Pensively Victoria sat at the casement, waiting, with fearful expectation, the summons of her conductors.

Their intents respecting her she was entirely a stranger to; for, if her life was their object, the gloomy and lonely recesses of the unfrequented forests through which they had travelled, afforded certain concealment for any deed, however atrocious.

She began to conclude, that they were but the emissaries of some enemy of her's, though who that could be she was entirely ignorant of

The

The old woman now knocked at the door of her apartment.

Victoria, having removed the furniture she had placed against it, admitted her unwelcome visitor, who came to inform her that the morning repast was ready below.

The old woman added, that the men was impatient to be gone, as they had already waited longer than their orders permitted them, on purpose that she might have as much rest as possible, to enable her the better to endure the fatigues of the journey.

"By whose orders have they performed this act of injustice and oppression?" demanded Victoria.

"You'll know that time enough, I warrant," returned the woman: "but my directions are, not to answer any of your questions: therefore you may spare yourself the trouble of talking."

Sighing deeply, Victoria descended, and partook of the repast that was laid before her.

The men were, in the meanwhile, busied in getting the horses ready.

When they had done, one of them entered the hut, and, taking her up in his arms, placed her on a horse, and observed, that as she had rode very quietly the day before, he would not bind

bind her on it—a circumstance which she was very thankful for, as it made her sit very uncomfortably, and increased her fatigue.

The men now proceeded through the forest which Victoria had seen in the morning.

When they had emerged from its gloomy shades, they entered on a wild and mountainous country, through which they travelled the whole of the day, without meeting a human being, or any vestiges of the habitations of man, from whose busy haunts they seemed to be far removed.

Towards evening the party stopped,

 and

and Victoria was helped off her horse.

Some provisions were spread on the ground, and a flask of wine, of which they invited her to partake.

Victoria, being excessively thirsty with the heat of the day, accepted of some wine.

While the men were eating, she sat on the ground, meditating on her melancholy situation.

When her guards had finished their repast, and the horses were made ready, they proceeded slowly on the whole of the night, taking the precaution to lead

lead the horse Victoria rode, lest in the gloom she might endeavour to effect her escape.

The sun had scarcely visited the hemisphere, when the party arrived at a small hut.

There a carriage was waiting, into which they put Victoria; and two of the men ascending with her, it rolled on towards its destination.

Victoria now, for the first time, had courage to view the countenances of her fellow-travellers; but her gaze was momentary.

She found herself unable to look on

one of them, without starting with the deep terror that took possession of her.

A pair of bushy eye-brows hung over his small darkly-meaning eyes. His whiskers and mustachios nearly covered his face: his figure was colossal, but considerably shortened by a stoop in his shoulders; which, with a large mouth and small crooked nose, made him a perfect picture of abhorrence.

The other ruffian had not so disgusting an appearance: yet the villain seemed indelibly impressed on his sallow countenance.

Both

Both of them preserved a continued silence during the journey, and Victoria was left undisturbed to her melancholy reflections.

When she had maturely considered every circumstance, her suspicions, for the first time, glanced on the Duca de Rodolpho, as being the cause of her seizure.

She could hardly, however, believe it possible, that he would dare to perpetrate such an act of atrocity.

"Oh, Heaven!" said she, mentally, "have pity on me, and, in thy gracious mercy, deliver me from the hands of my enemies.

"If

"If ever my lips gave utterance to the pious prayer, or my knees paid their homage at thy earthly throne, confound, I beseech thee, their wicked plans, and restore me to my sorrowing parents!"

From her melancholy ruminations, which drew the frequent tear from her lovely eyes, she was often, though momentarily, drawn to survey the various scenes of nature which presented themselves continually to her view, often uniting the beautiful and the terrific.

On one side appeared lovely plains, interspersed with neat cottages, embowered in groves of vines and orange trees.

Among

Among these were seen the peasants pursuing their daily labour, or the shepherd attending his fleecy charge.

At a distance was seen a river meandring through a lovely vale, its glossy surface reflecting the rays of the sun.

In one place, it was obscured by an intervening hill: in another, it was lost to the view, by dividing into several streams, till, again uniting, it was seen glittering through the openings of the trees that covered its banks, as the sun, piercing their umbrageous shades, sparkled, in reflected brilliance, on its wavy bosom.

The horn of the hunter, echoing among

among the vallies, at times broke on the silence around—

———"By distance made more sweet,
Which o'er the stream with fond delay,
Round an holy calm diffusing,
Love of peace and lonely musing,
In hollow murmurs died away."

On the other side were wild and terrific precipices, whose sides, darkened by the gloomy pine and spreading larch, added a tenfold horror to the scene.

Huge rocks were piled on each other, in awful confusion, till their rugged summits seemed to pierce the clouds.

A solemn

A solemn silence reigned amidst these dreary, horrific scenes, save where the cataract, rushing down the steep declivities, with hideous roar, broke upon the solemn silence.

Nature there appeared to be but newly born—but just emerged from the chaotic regions of embryo worlds.

Scarcely allowing time to refresh the weary mules, which was always done in some lonely place, did Victoria and her watchful guards travel for three successive days.

On the evening of the fourth, as the carriage gained the summit of the hill, what was Victoria's terror, at finding

all

all her horrible suspicions so fatally verified, when she saw, rising amongst the surrounding scenery, the gloomy turrets of the Castello de Rodolpho.

CHAP.

CHAP. IV.

OUR history must now go back to that period when the Duca de Rodolpho introduced Alphonso to the Signor Torralto.

Amazed at the wild distraction which appeared in his disjointed sentences, and the pallid hue of his countenance, when he rushed out of the chamber, the Duca immediately followed him, and demanded the cause of his agitation.

"Rodolpho," said Torralto, in a trembling voice, "who is that youth?"

"The

"The son of a peasant," returned the duca, apparently much surprized at the question—"who, having preserved my life, at the imminent hazard of his own, when attacked by a numerous banditti—in return, I promised to advance the fortunes of his son; and from that time he has resided in my castello."

"A peasant's son!" said Torralto. Marked you not his figure, his countenance? Heard you not his voice? Did they not call some one to your remembrance?—No, no: he is no peasant's son, duca."

Rodolpho started; for the resemblance hinted at by Torralto, which had

had struck him so forcibly, till now never occurred to the duca.

He was silent for a few moments, and then replied—

"All, I fear, is not right: yet Bernardo positively assured me it was; and which you, Signor, may probably recollect."

"I do," exclaimed Torralto, who shook with recollections of a nature horrible to reflect on—"Mention it no more. Where was it you first saw the youth?"

"On the Montoni estate," returned the duca.

"The

"The Montoni estate! Nay, then, 'tis past all doubt: it must be so. Where is Bernardo? He might inform you if my suspicions are just or not.

"'Tis now many years since I last heard of him," returned Rodolpho; "and I conclude that he is either dead, or has secluded himself from the world."

"We must not wait to find him," replied Torralto. "The bird is fledged, and may soon fly his nest: but that it must be our care to prevent. Duca, we must silence that youth: our safety, our repose, demand it. His look, his actions, all remind me of him who fell beneath the thirsty dagger's point.

"Even

"Even so, I think," returned the duca: "you are right, Torralto, in being cautious: it may be so, and we cannot be too careful."

"I am glad you are convinced of my prudential plan," replied Torralto, "and when the midnight bell has tolled, I will meet you. Meanwhile, let us not betray by our looks the dark deed which is brooding in our minds, lest we excite suspicion.

"I will now return; and, when I again see him, will slightly mention the cause of the deep terror I betrayed, to be a thing of custom, and frame some well-according tale."

When they found their designs frustrated by the flight of Alphonso, the rage of the duca knew no bounds.

Fear likewise had some share in causing his agitation; for it was evident he had discovered their intentions, and if he really was the person both Torralto and himself suspected, there was but too much reason to be alarmed.

He immediately summoned his trusty confident Spignoletti, and, after he had directed him what course to pursue, a party of domestics were immediately sent in search of the fugitive under his direction.

It

It was reasonable to suppose that he might be on his way to the residence of Hubert, and the account of the peasant, at whose cottage Alphonso slept the first night, confirmed that idea.

The instructions which Spignoletti had received from the duca comprehended the death of Alphonso, and in order to perpetrate that horrible act, he followed him as far as the monastery of St. Benedict.

There he easily procured admittance, as the monks were then satisfied that the appearance which had put them into such a dreadful disturbance, was merely ideal.

Spignoletti carefully concealed his designs respecting Alphonso, and the two monks, Francisco and Pierre, supposing he was some domestic of his, made a point of being attentive to him, and, amongst other things, conducted him through the monastery, and, the remains of Father Bernardo being now interred, they went into his late apartment.

Spignoletti when he entered had no sooner cast his eyes on the painting which had so much excited the attention of Alphonso, than his countenance changed to a deadly livid hue, his eyes seemed ready to start from their sockets, his hair stood on end, and an universal tremor seized his frame.

"Why,"

"Why," said he in a frantic voice, "do those eyes glare on me?—Hide me from their searching gaze.—Oh, mercy, mercy! how the recollection shakes my soul.—Away from me, tormenting spectre!—Deep, deep in the bowels of the earth, would I sink to avoid that horrible sight!"

He now rushed out of the chamber, and collecting his companions, quitted the monastery immediately, and as soon as he had recovered from his agitation, continued the pursuit of Alphonso; and for once his caution was misled by the pretended ignorance of Benedetto.

Regaining, therefore, the higher road, as advised by the peasant, he conceived that ere night he should

overtake his destined victim; and in that continued hope, he travelled on, scarcely allowing the horses a moment's rest, till they arrived at the Castello de Montoni.

Spignoletti finding on inquiry, that Hubert had just set off for Genoa, was of opinion that Alphonso must be with him.

Resting a day, therefore, at Montoni, which was absolutely necessary after the fatigues himself and his companions had undergone, he set off in pursuit of Hubert.

But notwithstanding his frequent inquiries concerning him on the road, he failed in obtaining the least intelligence;

gence; for either Hubert had travelled another way, or, his appearance exciting no curiosity, he had not been noticed by any one; and in such an extensive place as Genoa he had little hope of finding him, which indeed on his arriving there was the case; and after some time thus fruitlessly employed, he was obliged to return to report the failure of his mission to the Duca de Rodolpho.

As he was passing by the Castello de Voltorno, he thought he beheld Alphonso on the walls, in earnest converse with Conte Manfred.

Resolving to know if it really was him, he told his companions to pro-

ceed gently forward, and await his coming at St. Remo.

He then concealed himself near the castello, and the next morning was fully convinced he had not been deceived in his ideas, for he beheld Alphonso walking in the forest.

He then slowly and cautiously followed his steps till he entered the ruins, and, secreting himself amongst them, took from his belt a dagger, and watched an opportunity of rushing on his intended victim and stabbing him before he was aware of his danger, or could take any steps for his defence.

Alphonso, however, as stated, fortunately

tunately observed him, and Spignoletti hastily retreated, fearful of being known and of encountering his sword; and contenting himself with having discovered his residence, he hastened onwards to join his companions, and shortly after arrived at the Castello de Rodolpho.

During his absence a messenger had arrived from Voltorno, with a pacquet, which Rodolpho having opened, perused the following lines:——

" Conte Manfred, learning from his daughter that her heart accords not with the honour designed her by the Duca de Rodolpho, is necessitated to

state to him the impossibility of the alliance taking place.

MANFRED."

The countenance of Rodolpho turned pale with rage.

"What!" said he, as soon as he was able to articulate, "am I then scorned? My titles, fortune, influence, held as nought, and trifled with by the cold blood of coy virginity?—By Heaven, it shall not be!—

"Fellow," said he, turning to the messenger, "go bear this answer to your master, tell him to remember that

that Rodolpho, when he sues, dreams not of refusals.—But 'tis well, let him sleep in security.—Despise my threats, reject my friendship—but the time will come when he shall tremble at my vengeance."

The messenger retired with this incoherent reply, and, in a few days, returned with the following answer:—

"The Duca de Rodolpho, it seems, has thought fit to threaten Conte Manfred with his vengeance, but he would do well to remember that he wears a sword, hitherto unstained by party broils and only drawn in the service of his country; yet in the present cause it would not rest, but be wielded in

the preservation of a daughter's happiness.

"Conte Manfred fears the threats of the duca, as little as he values his friendship, and, should he venture to commence any hostile attack, will not find him backward in repulsing it."

Rodolpho, the slave of his passions, would that instant have assembled his vassals and have forced Victoria from her father's walls, but was restrained by the considerate and crafty coolness of Torralto.

"Your rage, duca," said he, "transports you beyond the bounds of reason. Only reflect for a moment how

how you would draw upon you the anger of the state by such a forceful act. If I might advise, (and the time has been when my counsels were not rejected) you would by stratagem get Victoria into your power, without the trammels of marriage.—Is not the Duca de Rodolpho of my opinion? Does he not see how much better it would be to feign grief at her refusal; to conceal your deep designs, and to insure their success."

"Torralto," returned Rodolpho, "thou hast well advised—it shall be so, my friend. By this means I shall indeed enjoy a sweet revenge; but we must be cautious, lest our intents be suspected: when Manfred thinks himself

self secure, then is the time to put our plans into effect."

It was shortly after the duca had formed his resolution respecting Victoria, that Spignoletti arrived; but when he related to him the events of his journey, and concluded with the circumstance of his having seen Alphonso at the Castello de Voltorno, the rage of Rodolpho knew no bounds.

Torralto too was greatly alarmed at such an unlooked for event.

Guilt is ever suspicious, and the duca now imagined that Alphonso had become acquainted with some deeds of

of his, which his conscience told him were dark and horrible, and that in consequence of his disclosing them to Manfred, he had refused his offered alliance.

The death of Alphonso, therefore, became now a matter of serious importance to his safety.

After several consultations, in which Spignoletti was included, it was resolved that Torralto should proceed as soon as possible to Voltorno, where with two assassins, he should endeavour to terminate their fears respecting Alphonso, by his death, and that Spignoletti, with some trusty domestics, should some time after seek an

opportunity

opportunity of seizing Victoria, and bringing her to the castello.

The execution of these horrible plans, were, however, delayed by the removal of Manfred and their intended victims to Genoa, and there they were attended with much greater difficulty, and, with respect to Alphonso, entirely prevented by his suddenly leaving the residence of the conte, but Victoria, as related, unhappily fell into the power of the remorseless Duca de Rodolpho.

When Spignoletti arrived with his lovely prize, he acquainted the duca with his success, who exclaimed :—

"At

"At length I am revenged of Manfred; for by the capture of his daughter who spurned my proferred love, I fix a wound no time can heal, sharp as my insult, endless as my hate."

Saying these words, he ordered Spignoletti to conduct Victoria to the western tower, which, being remote from the inhabited parts of the castello, was more convenient for the perpetration of those deeds of horror which he intended it should witness.

Victoria, when the carriage rolled into the spacious area in front of the gloomy castello, almost fainted with her dreadful apprehensions, and in that situation was lifted out of it and carried by Spignoletti through many passages

passages to an apartment, where leaving her, he departed, fastening the door after him.

Victoria had not been left to herself many minutes ere the door was opened and Rodolpho made his appearance, at the sight of whom she turned pale with terror.

"Well, Signora," said he, "our situations are altered, and the insulted Rodolpho can now triumph in his turn over his well concerted schemes."

"Great is the triumph, Duca," said the hapless Victoria, exerting her fortitude to enable her to reply to his insulting address, "of such a lawless act—it becomes thee well

to

to glory in such a daring outrage; 'tis like Rodolpho."

"Your reproaches, Victoria," said the duca, sternly, "will avail you little here; you are now in my castello, safe beyond the reach of fate; yet I would wish to open the gates of your prison to restore you to freedom; I come to offer terms."

"And what are they?" returned Victoria.

"The acceptance of the love of Rodolpho," said the duca.

Here he paused, and Victoria casting on him a haughty look of contempt and anger turned indignantly away

away without deigning to answer him.

"You know now the terms," said he—"respect the favour; three days will I give you for your final answer, on the fourth your election must be made."

So saying he left the hapless Victoria, who, overcome with a situation so dreadful, and the little prospect there was of relief, sunk down on the couch, and for a while the warring agonies of her bosom stole away her senses, and she became for a period ignorant of her woes.

When she recovered she found herself still alone, and though she was but

but too conscious that Rodolpho would take every precaution to prevent her escape, she exerted herself to arise and to examine the apartment she was in, in the faint hope that there might be some means of escape from it, and which, if she was not so fortunate as to effect, she determined should be her tomb rather than consent to the designs of Rodolpho; but at that moment, hearing a noise at the door of her apartment, trembling with fear, she stopped and listened to the grating of the bolts as they were drawn back; the portal at length opened, and Spignoletti entered with a basket of provisions, when urged by a sudden impulse she suddenly sprung beside him and hastened from the chamber, but the old ruffian hastily threw down his

basket

basket and following her seized her by her garments ere she had advanced many paces into the corridor.

"Your attempts to escape, Signora," said he, as he dragged her back to her chamber, "are useless. You will remain here as long as the duca pleases. The last that was here never left it; and such may be your fate, if you prove refractory to his will."

So saying, he left her to the sad ruminations, which took such hold of her faculties, that she remained immoveable, and scarcely conscious of existence.

During that time, the night advanced unnoticed; and its gloomy shades en-

veloping

veloping her apartment, she was unable to examine it, in the fond hope which she still fostered of finding some outlet by which she might escape.

She therefore recommended herself to the all-powerful protection of Heaven, and, taking a small portion of the provisions which Spignoletti had brought, lay down on the couch, in the fond hope that sleep would steep her senses in forgetfulness, and give ease to her toil and care-worn frame.

Her slumbers were light, yet they refreshed her; and she arose when the first dawn of morning illumined the dreary confines of her prison.

She looked at the casement, which was

was high up in the wall, far beyond her reach, and strongly grated.

She sighed; for from thence she was well assured there were no means of escape.

Turning from it, she was gazing on the carved stone-work which was over the hearth, and which represented the arms of the founders of the castello, when she perceived an inscription on it, that had been nearly all defaced, apparently by design.

A few words which she could just discern excited her attention, and which, shuddering with horror, she found to be as follows:—

* * * * * * How

* * * * * * How many tedious days have I been confined in this dreary apartment! But Rodolpho pities not his hapless wife. If I had done any act which could merit such cruel treatment, I would not ask thee to give me freedom; but, conscious * * * * *

Here she was unable to proceed; for the characters were completely defaced, while the remembrance of what Spignoletti had told her the preceding evening, now occurred to her, and, with it, the reports which had some years back prevailed concerning the sudden death of the Duchesa de Rodolpho.

"Oh, heavens!" she exclaimed, "the dreadful crime of murder has then

then been surely committed in this dreadful apartment."

Hardly daring to raise her eyes, lest they should meet with some soul-appalling object, she sat down on her couch, to recover the terrors which her sad thoughts had excited.

It was some time ere she again ventured to look around her, when, summoning all her courage, she arose, and pursued her search.

Something which was lying on a table, which stood in a distant corner of the chamber, caught her attention.

She approached it, and found it was

a miniature,

a miniature, which, on examination, appeared to have been done some years back for the Duca de Rodolpho.

While she was gazing at it, the tapestry which covered the walls of the chamber waved with the wind; and a thought suddenly occurring to Victoria, that there must be some door behind it, through which the gale had found admittance, she hastily approached it, in order to find if her conjectures were right.

Lifting up the tapestry from the ground, in order to examine the walls, to her distracted vision appeared the ghastly object of a human skeleton!

Screaming with terror, she quitted

 her

her hold of the tapestry, and fell lifeless upon the floor, alike void of feeling for the past, or sensations to the horrors of the present moment.

CHAP.

CHAP. V.

When Victoria opened her eyes, she found herself lying on the couch, and Spignoletti standing near her.

"What, in the name of San Marco, has been the matter?" said he. "I have had a fine deal of trouble with you. I thought once that you had taken leave of us. I sent to the duca, to acquaint him with your situation. However, now you are better, I will go and tell him of it."

Saying this, he left the apartment.

Victoria, notwithstanding the terror his presence always excited, almost felt a wish that he would remain in it, so greatly was she terrified with what she had seen.

However, her reliance on the goodness of Heaven was not weakened by her misfortunes.

Rising off her bed, she threw herself on her knees, and fervently implored the omnipotent Creator of the world to grant her sufficient fortitude to enable her to support the miseries that awaited her.

Nor were her prayers unheard; for she felt her spirits much better and more composed than they had been before.

before. So sweetly do the pleasing rites of devotion tend to assure and comfort the distressed, who place their firm reliance on an all-merciful Providence.

She now ate a little, and was at times almost tempted to smile at her terrors respecting the skeleton, which she had but little doubt belonged to the unfortunate Duchesa de Rodolpho, both from the inscription on the wall, and the words of Spignoletti.

The shades of evening now began to enter slowly the grated casement, and Victoria concluded that she must have remained insensible for a considerable time.

She sighed to think that the first day was nearly gone, and that only two more remained when the dreaded period which Rodolpho had affixed for her answer would arrive.

She determined the next morning to examine the other sides of her apartment which the tapestry concealed, and, retiring to her couch, enjoyed a better repose than she had on the preceding night.

Awoke from her slumbers by the beams of the sun darting through her casement, Victoria bethought herself of her intended search.

At one time she felt almost inclined not to examine farther, lest she should discover

discover a still more ghastly object than had before met her view; but at length, determined to persevere, with trembling limbs, she approached the tapestry, and cautiously raised it.

No other object, however, than the rugged wall was behind, and, encouraged by this, she continued her examination in another part.

She found a small arched door, defended by iron studs, and seemingly strongly fastened on the outside.

Nothing, besides, met her search; and Victoria was somewhat more easy in her mind; and being assured that but one dreadful object was in her chamber,

ber, she again turned her ruminations on her situation.

From the great expedition that had been used in conducting her to the Castello de Rodolpho, she could entertain but little hopes of succour, even if her friends knew where she was.

She greatly feared this might not be the case; yet, as she reflected that in all probability they perhaps might conjecture that Rodolpho had put his threats of vengeance in execution, she trusted that if by any means she could gain time, all might yet be well.

She often thought of the deep distress in which her parents must be involved,

volved, and felt somewhat happy that Alphonso was, at least for the present, spared the anguish the knowledge of her situation would occasion him.

A sigh escaped her while his loved form rose to her mental view, and which, perhaps, she was destined never more to behold.

Still, however, she endeavoured to comfort herself with hopes, and trusting in the goodness of an all-seing power, she accepted of the provisions which Spignoletti brought her.

When night rolled on, in gloomy shades, recommending herself to that all-powerful Protector who never de-

serts those who rely on him for aid, she courted repose on her hard couch.

Whilst she slumbered, the wakeful imagery of fancy brought to her mental view the following vision.

She thought she heard a strain of music, whose sweet enchanting notes seemed more than human.

It appeared to be floating in the air above her—at one while, dying away in a soft cadence, and then rising, in bolder melody, till the harmonious tones seemed to fill the vast aërial expause.

She thought she was hardly able to breathe,

breathe, lest she should interrupt the heavenly sounds.

At length all was hushed; but still her fancies, acting on themselves, again made her listen to the sweet ideal notes, which were at once so expressive, so tender, and yet so animating, that they seemed to impress on her mind sufficient fortitude to enable her to endure the horrors of her situation, while her pillow was moistened by the tears of rapture which stole from beneath her closed eye-lids.

Her dream still continued; and she now beheld her apartment illuminated by rays of heavenly brightness, and a form of transcendant beauty standing by the side of her couch.

Azure

Azure garments, that seemed to float on the bosom of the fragant zephyrs that sported around her, were confined to a slender waist by a band of diamonds.

Her beautiful tresses, resembling the beams of the sun, were disposed in lovely ringlets and braids, which encircled her head, on which was a tiara of rich brilliants.

Again Victoria listened to the Heavenly harmony, which seemed to fill the chamber.

Shortly after it ceased, while the beauteous form, smiling with looks of ineffable love, thus addressed her :—

"Victoria,

"Victoria, Heaven hath heard thy prayers. I am commissioned from on high to be thy guardian angel. Trust in the goodness of the Almighty, and fear not the power of man."

The bright form now appeared to dissolve in air, and shortly after the chamber seemed to be involved in darkness, and Victoria waking pondered with delight on the vision she had beheld.

She returned thanks to Heaven for the comfort and fortitude which her dream had inspired her with, and again sunk into the silent embrace of sleep, from which she was disturbed by the bright beams of morning.

She

She could now survey her apartments without feeling those sensations of terror which had formerly pervaded her frame, and lifting up the tapestry she looked at the skeleton, and, as she now examined it more attentively than she had before, saw a rusty dagger lying within the bones.

That circumstance was a fatal evidence of the means that had been used to deprive the helpless mortal of life, to whom these sad remains once belonged, and Victoria, while she dropped the fast flowing tears of pity over them, earnestly supplicated Heaven to grant repose to the soul that once animated them.

Spignoletti did not enter her apartment

ment with her supply of provisions before the evening; he set down his lamp on the table, and, looking at Victoria with a malignant satisfaction in his countenance, said,——

"Signora, the Duca de Rodolpho ordered me to acquaint you that he designs visiting you to-morrow morning."

Victoria trembled on receiving this unwelcome intelligence.

She, however, resolved not to let her emotions be seen by her savage attendant, and disdaining either to answer or look at him, turned away her head.

Spignoletti observed her contemptuous

tuous conduct, and muttering a few incoherent sentences, departed the chamber.

Assured as Victoria was by her dream, yet a small degree of terror pervaded her frame, as the glimmering light proclaimed the near approach of the eventful morning.

She, however, collected all her fortitude to her aid, to support her during his visit; yet when she heard approaching paces in the corridor which led to her apartment, and the clanking of the bolts and bars, as they were removing from the door of her chamber, her heart beat with increasing violence against her side.

At length the portal was thrown open, and her bitter persecutor entered.

When the duca surveyed his captive, and saw that her lovely features were not disfigured by despair or grief, and that she did not betray any emotions of terror at his approach, he expected a reception favourable to his wishes, and his stern countenance was unbent to a smile.

"May I entertain hopes, lovely Victoria," said he, "from the serenity which is displayed on your beautiful features, that you will permit me to address you in the language of love? Bless me, sweet maid, with a favourable answer, and Rodolpho will lay his

his treasures at your feet; unnumbered vassals shall crowd to obey you, and continual rounds of festive pleasures shall await your future days."

Victoria, collecting all her native dignity, regarded him with a look of fixed contempt.

"Hear me, duca," said she, "and let my reply to your insulting question be considered as my firm resolve. When you were a suitor for my hand at the castello of my father, and sanctioned by him, my soul averted with horror at the idea of a union with you. Think you then Victoria will listen to base and abandoned proposals, and, where she disdained to bestow her hand, consent to be allied in infamy? No,

No, duca, never while life animates her frame."

The countenance of Rodolpho, lately so full of smiles, now blackened with rage.

"Haughty fair," said he, "perhaps we yet may find a way to tame those indignant ebulitions of passion, of no other import than to accelerate my purpose. Do not you reflect that no one can rescue you here; that you are in every respect subject to my will, and that force would give me what I have hitherto tamely sued for?"

"If I did not put my trust in a Divine Providence," returned Victoria, "I might perhaps tremble at your

words,

words. But know, duca, I do not fear you, while with an unaccusing conscience, I can solicit its protection."

"Idle talk," said Rodolpho, "we will put your boasted reliance to the test, since you scorn and ridicule my threats."

So saying, he seized the trembling Victoria in his arms, but by a sudden effort she disengaged herself, and lifting up the tapestry, said in a solemn tone——

"Duca, before you perpetrate fresh crimes, let this sad proof of your cruelty, these mouldering remains of your murdered wife be laid in the grave, and

and repent of that horrible deed, which is marked against you in the fatal volume in which the evil actions of thy life are thickly registered."

"Ha!" exclaimed the duca, wildly, "what do I see?—Distraction—hide it from my sight—hide it in the centre of the earth, deep, deep from human knowledge.—See you not how it follows me, how the eyes glare at me?—Oh, that touch—furies, let me go—have some pity—oh!"

Here with a deadly groan, the frantic Rodolpho fell senseless on the floor. The deep and dreadful workings of conscience in his guilty bosom, were too much for him to support, and he sunk beneath them.

Spignoletti,

Spignoletti, who was waiting in the corridor, alarmed by the groan, entered the apartment and conveyed the lifeless duca from it.

Victoria, with a truly grateful heart, blessed Heaven for her wonderful preservation, and sat down to recover the perturbation of her mind.

In the mean time, Spignoletti with some difficulty carried the duca to his chamber.

He was ignorant of the cause which had so greatly affected him, and awaited his recovery with some anxiety.

It was a long time ere Rodolpho opened

opened his eyes; he seemed for a time to be ruminating on some fearful act, then he hastily started from his couch and surveyed the chamber with a scrutinizing look.

At length, turning to Spignoletti, he said, in a voice rendered feeble by his emotions—

"Tell me, Spignoletti, whose skeleton was that I saw?"

The domestic now concluded that the senses of the duca were wandering, and astonished by his question and the urgent manner in which it was put to him, remained silent, not knowing what answer to make.

Rodolpho then in a louder tone and angry look, repeated the question.

"Skeleton, your excellenza," said Spignoletti, "I know of none. Where was it?"

"In the western chamber, concealed beneath the tapestry," said Rodolpho.

Spignoletti trembled.

"If there is one there, your excellenza, it can be no other than that of the duchesa; yet I always understood that Bernardo had taken it away, as he was ordered."

"I fear not," returned the duca, "Victoria shewed it me, nay more, told

told me it was the remains of my murdered wife."

"Did she?" said Spignoletti, "then that voice should be silenced—The dead tell no tales."

"Be silent," said the duca, "there is no danger. Is she not safe enough in the massy tower of my castello?—She can only tell the deed to the walls of her prison, who have witnessed the perpetration of it. By such an act, my intentions would be disappointed, which have long been the subject of my wakeful hours—But that skeleton, Oh how it has shocked my soul! Would that I could for ever blot it from my remembrance; but no, that is impossible. Still will it rankle at

my heart's core, embittering every moment of my existence."

Thus spoke the Duca de Rodolpho, who, though in possession of what in the world's regard ensures happiness, namely, the possession of riches, titles, and power, yet was miserable. His conscience, ever at enmity with his actions, disturbed his repose; he had acquired his possessions by acts which even the most hardened, the most depraved, would start at; and so inured was he to the shedding of blood, that even at the moment when his conscience reproached him for his offences, he was on the point of committing fresh crimes.

The more the duca plunged in guilt, the

the more atrocious were the deeds he was obliged to commit to cover it from the eyes of the world; and such, indeed, is the general consequences of those who commit sinful acts, till at length they are overwhelmed beneath the enormity of their offences.

The idea of going to Genoa now occurred to Rodolpho, for he was not able to enter the apartment where Victoria was till time had diminished the terrors he had endured at the sad spectacle it contained; and he likewise thought it would be a prudent step in him to remain there some time, till the search that was in all likelihood making after Victoria should be entirely given up. He was well assured of the impossibility of her ever being able

to escape from her apartment, which was situated in a retired part of the western wing, the way to which was known only to Spignoletti and himself.

With respect to Alphonso, he had received the unwelcome intelligence from Torralto, that he had often seen him, but never in a situation which would afford him an opportunity of safely executing his designs, and that he had just learnt that he had left the residence of Conte Manfred, but whither he was gone was hitherto unable to discover.

As soon, therefore, as the duca had somewhat recovered from the shock he had received from the unexpected sight of

of the miserable remains in the chamber of Victoria, he gave orders to his domestics to prepare for a journey to Genoa. At the castello he only left one domestic besides Spignoletti, whose name was Hugo, a poor uninformed creature, seemingly well fitted for the purpose required of him, as his simplicity, added to a timorous disposition, would hinder him from remarking any circumstance that might occur, and his fears prevent him from prying about the uninhabited parts of the castello, which for many years were supposed to be the residence of an unquiet spirit.

The duca soon after left his castello, and proceeded with a numerous train of vassals and domestics along the

Alps towards Savona, where, when he arrived, he embarked for Genoa, where he had a magnificent pallazio, convinced that this step would effectually remove the suspicion which it was reasonable to conclude would rest on him, and that he would hereafter be enabled in consequence to prosecute his designs respecting Victoria with greater facility.

Her arrival at his castello was a profound secret to all of his domestics, excepting those who accompanied Spignoletti, and they had orders never to divulge that circumstance, which a bribe induced them to observe with strict attention.

Victoria, to her great delight, had remained

remained perfectly undisturbed for many days; Spignoletti never entered the chamber as had formerly been his custom, but just opened the door, and left the basket which contained the provisions on the floor, while fear was strongly depicted on his gloomy countenance. This behaviour of his made her suspect that he was informed of the skeleton being there, and that in all probability he had been concerned in that horrible transaction, else why the fear he so constantly exhibited.

She now remarked that her quantity of provisions was much increased, and that her jailer visited her every second day, and not seeing or hearing any

thing of the duca, she ventured to inquire if he was in the castello.

Spignoletti at first seemed as if he did not intend to answer her, but after some delay, sullenly replied, that he had left it for some days.

This gladsome intelligence was a source of the greatest delight to Victoria, and made her for a while almost forget her imprisonment, for she now began to foster the pleasing hopes that her friends would have an opportunity to rescue her from the wicked designs of the abandoned Rodolpho.

She now thought of Alphonso; she recollected all his solicitude respecting

her,

her, and his assiduous and attentive conduct; his last words were also fresh in her memory: still did the lov-ed mournful tones of his voice seem to sound in her ear while he repeated.—

"Adieu, lovely Victoria, I go to unfold the mysteries which surround me. Should fate be propitious, you will again see me—again shall I be blessed with the sight of all that is dear to me on earth; but if my unkind stars do not permit me to deve-lope the cause of the mysterious events of my life, then must I bid adieu to the loved idol of my soul for ever."

Often did she sigh when she re-flected on the agonizing sensations she endured at thir parting: she was

well assured that he could not have heard of her unfortunate situation, or else that arm that had twice preserved her life would again be exerted in her cause. She, however, trusted that a short time would release her from her miserable captivity, and also develope occurrences that had befallen Alphonso.

She had already experienced the protection of heaven in so wonderful a manner, and she felt such increasing confidence in its all gracious mercy and protection, that her mind was soon restored to a state of tranquillity to which she had been a stranger for some time.

CHAP.

CHAP. VI.

THE former companions of the Duca de Rodolpho's riotous and dissipated hours heard of his arrival at Genoa with delight. Again were his nights passed in revelry and intemperance; again were his days devoted to pleasure. But not the syren song of the courtezan, not the mirthful sallies of his friends, could calm the restless monitor that reigned within his conscience, unceasingly tormenting him, and he now even dreaded to be left alone lest he should see some horrible vision.

Sometimes he resolved to combat with his passions, and deliver Victoria

toria to her parents; but by such an act he must avow his unprincipled conduct in detaining her, and that policy forbid, and the recollection of her lovely form heating his imagination, soon drove far away all his resolutions; and since he had proceeded so far, it was but one step further in guilt to put him in possession of those charms.

His thoughts not unfrequently were bent on Alphonso, and the more he considered all the circumstances relative to that youth, the more he concurred in the suspicions of Toralto, who had now given over his fruitless search; for notwithstanding all his inquiries, he was not able to learn where Alphonso was gone; for the

the Conte Manfred had, with much caution, prevented the intended destruction of his young friend from being known to his domestics, fearful lest any accident might befall him from the cruel emissaries of Rodolpho, and therefore necessity obliged Torralto to await a more convenient season to put his scheme into execution.

From that ready agent in his iniquitous schemes the duca was informed of all the events that had taken place in the pallazio of Conte Manfred since Victoria had been carried off.

A party of his people had been sent to the castello de Rodolpho to learn

learn if she was there, but his arrangements prevented a possibility of their discovering the detention of his lovely prize.

He exulted in his success, and laughed at the impenetrable mystery that seemed to hang over Victoria's departure from Genoa, and he now only awaited a favourable time to return to his castello, in order to complete his nefarious and diabolical plans respecting the hapless victim of his dark passions.

When, therefore, he had learned that the parties sent in search of Victoria were returned, he determined to proceed as secretly as possible to his castello; and taking with him only

only a few domestics, he set out accompanied by Torralto, and travelling without intermission soon approached the forest near his residence.

His people were ordered to remain with Torralto in its concealing recesses, to await the return of the duca, as he did not wish his arrival to be known to the neighbouring peasantry.

Towards the close of day he entered the castello by a private postern, and repaired to the abode of Spignoletti, who having received intimation of his coming had expected him for some time.

"Is Victoria safe?" said he, with impatience

impatience and apprehension strongly marked in his countenance.

"Perfectly so, your excellenza," replied the trusty confidant of his iniquitous plans.

"Bid her then expect a visit from me in an hour hence," returned the duca, "at which time you will find me in the cedar chamber."

Spignoletti instantly departed to perform his orders, and Rodolpho repaired to his apartments which he paced with an agitated step, for his mind, now that he was on the eve of perpetrating the horrible crime he had long meditated, was ill at ease.

The

The gloom of evening deepened around.

The painted casements covered with armorial bearings, and the trees that waved their lofty heads near them, contributed to obstruct the little light that yet remained.

Fear is always a constant resident in a guilty mind.

The Duca de Rodolpho was the slave of superstition; every noise he heard filled him with terror; at every step he took, he would turn and gaze around him with affright. The sound of his own paces disturbed him—he grew pale and trembled—his thoughts were dark and gloomy as the scene around

around him; for the remembrance of past deeds crowded thickly to his recollection, and as he walked by the full length portraits of his ancestors which covered the walls of the chamber, he thought they seemed to frown at him.

A hollow blast rushed through the chamber, and the trees without were uncommonly agitated. Rodolpho gazed at their waving summits which bent beneath its violence.

At length the gale passed over castello, and a solemn silence ensued for a few minutes; when the duca started, for he thought he heard a sigh breathed deep and mournfully near him; he looked around, when his distended

gaze

gaze was arrested by the portrait of his father, the eyes of which appeared to roll on him.

Suddenly he fancied the figure moved, and at length saw it slowly leave the canvass, and with a noiseless pace traverse the apartment, when, as it stood before the open portal, it turned round and uttered in a hollow tone, "Beware;" it then continued its course, and passing into the next chamber, was no longer visible.

Frantic with horror, Rodolpho cried out:——

"Speak thy purpose, tormenting spirit; tell me of what I am to be-

ware;

ware; but no matter, portents and prodigies are lost on me: the die is cast, and Victoria shall be mine in spite of all your airy forms."

Saying these words, he started forward to follow the solemn shade, when a second blast howling through the corridors, closed the portal, which resisted his utmost attempts to open.

Foiled in his efforts, he turned about, when the portraits on the walls attracting his attention, to his distracted gaze he thought appeared the numerous apparitions of his ancestors, coming to torment him.

A soul-appalling horror took posses-

sion

sion of his faculties, and he rushed out of the chamber scarcely able to breathe.

In the corridor he met Spignoletti, who was coming according to his orders, to conduct him to the western chamber.

Rodolpho started when he beheld him.

"Whither wouldst thou lead me?" said he. "Art thou in league with those spirits?—Stand off, or my sword shall pierce thy vitals."

"Recollect yourself, your excellenza," said Spignoletti, "I came to conduct you to Victoria."

"To

"To Victoria," said the duca, "lead on then, for were instant annihilation to be the consequence, I would not draw back."

With a hasty step he now followed his domestic, and, when he arrived at the apartment of his lovely victim and beheld her, the disquiet and horror which appeared in his countenance soon vanished.

The peace Victoria had enjoyed during the absence of Rodolpho, and the confidence she placed in an all-merciful Providence, contributed to restore the roses in her cheeks; and though the agitation she experienced at the sight of her bitter enemy banished them in some degree, yet she

appeared

appeared uncommonly beautiful and interesting.

"Permit me, Signora," said the duca, "again to urge my suit. Permit me to hope that the ardent love of Rodolpho may meet an approving smile."

"Never, duca," returned Victoria, firmly, "my soul shrinks with horror at the idea.—Am I again to remind you that the remains of thy murdered wife are yet unintombed? And canst thou talk of love in the chamber where they lie mouldering without the holy rites of the church being performed, and the prayers of the devout for the repose of her immortal essence. And if your heart is so hardened, so lost to virtue,

 have

have you no fears respecting the consequences of your conduct towards me? Do you think that Conte Manfred will tamely suffer the unjust detention of his daughter?—No, duca, do not hope it: the day of retribution will come when thou, Rodolpho, shall dearly rue thy violent and oppressive acts.—Be generous, give me my liberty; suffer me to return to my parents, and endeavour by an act of justice to make some atonement for your having long deprived me of the comforts of life and agonized the bosoms of my friends."

"And do you really conceive that you will be able to alarm me with your threats, Signora?" returned Rodolpho sneeringly. "Know then, Victoria, that all your hopes of succour from Manfred

Manfred are vain, even at this time he is ignorant of your abode, and did he know it, what could he effect, though aided with the whole Genoese forces, against the towering walls of my castello, defended by my unnumbered vassals? Think not, Victoria, that I will return the jewel I so greatly prize from motive of fear, which could only alarm boys. Great has been the difficulties and dangers which my people have endured to obtain for their master the idol of his heart, and with life only will Rodolpho resign thee. Accept then, Victoria, my love, nor tempt to acts of violence the man who so much adores you."

"If I am to consider your present

conduct," returned Victoria, "as a proof of your affection, let me have your hatred, for that may induce you to rid yourself of one who detests the sight of so cruel, so unprincipled a monster."

"Victoria," said the duca, "beware how you excite my anger: you are now in my power: accept then the love of Rodolpho."

"A thousand times," returned Victoria, "would I suffer the last agonizing pangs of dissolution, rather than accept what I so greatly abhor."

"Then since words cannot have the desired effect, force shall compel you

to

to my arms, haughty beauty," said the enraged Rodolpho.

He then hastily started from his seat, and advancing towards the terrified Victoria, caught her in his arms, and folding her to his bosom, imprinted a kiss on her trembling lips.

Frantic with horror, she extricated herself from his rude grasp, and darting swiftly past him, opened the door of the chamber, and rushing into the passage traversed with hasty steps the corridor, and finding at the extremity a narrow flight of steps, she ascended them and ran into a small chamber, the door of which was open.

She hastily examined it in hopes of

finding some outlet, but was disappointed.

The chamber had apparently been formerly appropriated for the purposes of an armoury for that wing of the castello, for she observed some heaps of pikes and swords, and a few coats of rusty armour were hung about the walls, with other instruments of ancient warfare.

She soon left the apartment and continued to ascend the steps, which at length terminated in a door strongly bolted.

With trembling hands she drew back the fastenings, and opening the portal, the gales of night blew coldly

on

on her, and passing on she found herself on the battlements of the castello.

Fear lent her wings; she flew along the summits of the towers, although she could with difficulty discern her dangerous path, till she arrived at an aperture occasioned by the roof having fallen in.

Stooping down she endeavoured to examine the place below, and perceiving that the ruins of the roof had made a large heap, she determined to throw herself on it, and happily arrived safe at the bottom without receiving any hurt.

She now stopped a few moments to gain breath, and to endeavour to re-

cover her wonted fortitude and pray to Heaven for protection.

A sable cloud, which hitherto had obscured the rays of night, now rolling from before the moon, she darted her silver beams through the aperture in the roof, and Victoria looking round beheld herself in a large apartment apparently in a very ruinous state. She opened a door she had seen, and looking anxiously forward, saw it led into a gloomy passage.

Ere she ventured to advance, she stopped to listen if there were any symptoms of her being pursued. No sound, however, broke on the silence of night, and she proceeded with caution, for the part of the passage she

was

was in was involved in darkness, and she was fearful, every step she took, lest she might be precipitated down some of the steep flight of stairs with which the castello abounded.

She now advanced to a broken casement, in order to discover what part of the building she was in, but the clouds again obscured the light of the moon, and every object was enveloped in darkness.

She, however, still proceeded for some time, when turning round a sharp angle, a faint light streaming through a large Gothic window enabled her to discover the place she was in, which was a large corridor, the

roof of which was vaulted; on the opposite side were many antique portals, which, however, she was fearful of approaching, lest the chambers they opened to might be inhabited.

Uncertain what course to pursue, Victoria remained for some time at the casement.

No sound was heard in the castello; all its inhabitants appeared to be enjoying the influence of sleep. It was therefore plain that the duca, if he followed her, of which she was uncertain, as her agitation was so great at the time, must have missed her.

G

She now put aside the mantling ivy that,

that; clustering around the casement, hindered her from seeing the surrounding objects when below.

At no very great distance was a court-yard: at first she determined to hazard the descent to it, but hearing a distant footstep, she hesitated; and, looking about, saw at the further extremity of the court a solitary centinel. She was, therefore, obliged to desist, as by such a step she would, beyond doubt, have discovered herself.

Pensively ruminating on her hapless state, she leaned on the stone-work of the casement, and gazing on the heavens with a tearful eye, fervently besought

besought the protection of him who there holds his awful abode.

It was now near midnight; the clouds, which had at times hid from the world the light of the moon, were now rolled far away, and her silver beams casting her mild radiance on the summit of the distant woods, and shining on the battlements and grey walls of the castello, rendered the view before her beautiful : no gusts of wind now disturbed the solemn tranquillity of the scene, and the branches of the trees scarcely moved to the gentle zephyr that murmured through their umbrageous recesses.

Victória now continued her uncer-

tain

tain progress, and gaining the end of the long dreary corridor, opened a small portal, which disclosed to her view a steep narrow flight of turret stairs. She was not without the hope that they might possibly lead her to some outlet; and as she descended them, fervently prayed that she might be enabled to effect her escape from these detested walls.

Committing herself to the care of that beneficent being who had hitherto so wonderfully preserved her, she proceeded down the steps, which were lighted by narrow apertures in the wall; and, passing through an archway, found herself in the same court as the centinel she had been

viewing

viewing from the Gothic casement above.

Victoria now stopped, irresolute what to do, when the centinel calling out to her, demanded the watch word.

The sound of his voice echoing amongst the buildings, startled Victoria as much as the purport of his demand, which she was unable to comply with, and therefore quickly opened the steps and gained the corridor above; when, to her terrified gaze, she beheld a light flash along the wall at the further end, and in another moment saw the Duca de Rodolpho hastily advancing, attended by Spignoletti.

"Well,

" Well, Signora," said the duca, exultingly, " how like you my castello? You, no doubt, have taken an ample survey of its interior, and perhaps are fatigued, and would gladly seek repose in your chamber, to which I will now conduct you."

Victoria replied not, but with an aching heart silently proceeded after her cruel persecutor, amazed at the great distance she was from her abode, for she had traversed nearly to the further extremity of the castello, where the soldiers who constantly guarded it resided.

When she entered her chamber, the duca followed her, and secured the door.

This

This action roused Victoria from the train of melancholy ideas which had been the subject of her thoughts, and looking at the duca with terror, perceived his dark and horrible intents too plainly legible in his malicious countenance.

He now approached, and seizing her unwilling hand, said—

"Why do you fly me, lovely Victoria? Consent to make me happy, and the business of my life shall be to render your's one scene of festive pleasures."

"Say rather, duca, one scene of detestable infamy," replied Victoria. "No, Rodolpho, let this answer suffice,

fice, rather would I die a thousand deaths than consent to your base wishes."

"I will put you to the proof, sweet maid," said Rodolpho, seizing her round her slender waist, and attempting to profane her trembling coral lips with the contaminating touch of his.

Screaming with horror, Victoria for a long time resisted his attempts on her honour, and watching an opportunity, she seized his stiletto, and pointed it to his heart.

The duca started away from her, alarmed at his danger, while Victoria said—

"Attempt again to approach me, and my arm, nerved by my cruel wrongs, shall urge this weapon against thy guilty bosom."

The duca was fearful of the event, and retired from the chamber, which was shortly after entered by Spignoletti, who, cautiously advancing towards the unsuspecting Victoria, wrenched the stiletto from her weak grasp, and with a ghastly grin went out to return the duca his weapon.

Rodolpho again entered, when Victoria, terrified beyond measure, ran to the further extremity of the chamber. Thither, however, he followed her, and dragged her towards the couch.

In her violent struggles her garments were torn, her lovely bosom was violated by the profane hands of the duca, and his passions, excited by the sight of her charms, he persisted, notwithstanding her struggles, in his endeavours to perpetrate the dreadful crime he had so long meditated.

Victoria's strength every moment decreased, and raising her eyes streaming with the fast-falling drops of agony, she faintly uttered—

"Oh, God of Heaven, have mercy on me! Protect thy servant in this moment of indescribable horror from a fate far worse than the most excruciating torments of dissolution."

Victoria could not utter more, she sunk almost insensible on the floor, and the duca would have succeeded in his brutal purposes, when a figure in armour rushed furiously through the arched door that was behind the tapestry into the chamber, and with his iron gauntlet struck him a furious blow, and then grasping his body, hurled him to the other end of the chamber, where he lay extended, apparently without sense or motion.

END OF VOL. II.

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